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AN ASSISTANT LOOKS FOR A TRAINING OR HOW TO BECOME AN INDEPENDENT TEACHER

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Dear members of the *Feldenkrais* community,

In view of the future of the *Feldenkrais Method*, its potential efficiency and development, I see three areas which call for attention:

1) The increasing number of jobless assistant trainers.
2) The traumatic path to become a trainer.
3) The hermetic format of the professional training – whom does it serve?

1) The increasing number of jobless assistant trainers

As more and more members of our community reach the required five years from their training and a mature level of competence, they are applying and usually getting the accreditation of assistant trainers, only to find the reality of no invitation for actual work in a training.

The fortunate ones who are invited to a training and get an opportunity to passively learn about leading a training, giving FIs on long days without a break, begin to doubt whether this way will prepare them to teach independently as a trainer. In fact, if they remain too long in their background role their creativity may be at risk of drying out.

Some assistants who are also training organizers or owners have better chances of being invited to other trainings that are also organized by an assistant trainer, and the meaning of this reciprocal closed circle is clear.

We are facing a situation in which many talented and enthusiastic unused assistants are frustrated. Can the *Feldenkrais* community remain indifferent to the waste of this resource of new teachers?

2) The traumatic path to become a trainer.

Undoubtedly, the responsibility and commitment to quality is guiding the TABs criteria to grant a senior assistant the power of an independent trainer. However, in reality there are repeated instances that show that the trainer candidate is dependent on the personal opinion of whoever happened to be in charge of the TAB. Candidates who provide letters of recommendations from five trainers familiar with their work are not guaranteed certification as the committee can reject or postpone or interrogate them (as if verbal answers to such questioning could possibly secure a solution in the actual teaching).

The path to become a trainer many times turns out to be an insulting trauma, as candidates are judged by colleagues that might not be free of self-interest or superiority considerations. For example, after three European candidates were totally rejected, a trainer called the NATAB to protest that his recommendation was not respected. The answer that he received from the NATAB member was, "We know why the Europeans want their own trainers — so that they will save money, not having to bring the Americans there."

Can we imagine the helplessness in front of such a covert argument? Aren't we breaking the spirit of our prospective teachers, traumatizing them in a way that will be reflected in the future? Aren't we creating an unsupportive community that is not nourished by trust?

There is a heavy feeling in the community about a monopolization tendency motivated by fear of competition and scarcity consciousness. I think we must quickly find additional ways to attest for the competence of the prospective trainers, releasing them from possibly biased colleagues.

Parallel to the difficulties in becoming a trainer there is an increasing difficulty for the new trainer to become an educational director. Hence, the prospect of being able to teach independently becomes practically unreachable for long years. The truth is that this method can only be taught from an independent and creative individual space. What inspires students to use their own independence is to be in the presence of a teacher who has cultivated and processed his/her own independence. When a guest trainer comes to a training, on which our training format is based, it is naive to think that s/he can teach what the educational director has in mind. And fortunately, this is how it is, because if we aspire to get imitations of a certain model, why would we need a variation of teachers?

3) The hermetic format of the professional training - whom does it serve?

The trainings are for sure an experience of growth and mind expansion but it is less sure that they produce practical results. Confronting the need to bring the *Feldenkrais Method* to life, many graduates seem to lack competence and confidence. It might be that we need more than 800 hours for students to learn this complex, creative art form. If Guilds would follow the graduates two or three years after graduation and survey how many of them are actively practicing and to what extent, we could better assess the efficiency of trainings.

Our fragmented training structure presents students with many teachers who each teach for a short period of time, with some trainings exposed to up to 8 trainers. The big audience in these trainings brings up in the trainer a tendency to be a bright, impressive performer, and this structure does not leave much room for interaction or feedback nor can it provide a means for verifying that individual trainees have enhanced their independent capacity which is so crucially important in acquiring FI competence.

Do beginners need right from the start to learn from many different teachers for short periods of time in order to perceive the method? Wouldn't it be better for developing depth of capacity to have the presence of one supportive teacher for a substantial period of time, and only after some reliable body of knowledge has been established, we could expose the group in the last two years to three other teachers (two weeks each). They will be enriched with the different perspective at a level in which they can appreciate variety.

Wouldn't the training be more efficient if the training were held along the year in shorter periods, with breaks that allow absorption and application? This might enable the teacher to continue leading her/his practice in front of the trainees. For acquiring the profession this might be not less important than the direct teaching in the training.

In my mind I have the model of how Moshe grew us in Tel-Aviv along 3 years for 6 days a week and 10 months a year. We were 13 around the table. I can not imagine to myself how I would have learned without witnessing his consistent practice where the same people came week after week and responded to Moshe's ever new inventions.

In America, Moshe gave intense trainings, as he did not want to live in America. He came back to Tel-Aviv after each segment to his groups and his practice. It was Eli Valder, one of our 13, that Moshe entrusted to run his institute between his journeys along all those years. (By the way, now the TAB could not find the bureaucratic frame to accredit Eli as a trainer, asking him to be an assistant first).

Moshe needed big groups because it was his time to put his method on the map of consciousness of the world. But we don't have to do the course in such intensity with such big numbers. It might be in the interest of the training owners, but I doubt if this supports the best acquisition of the profession. I think that we have to heal the quality of the method by modifying the format of the trainings, creating small trainings that will be personal, spread over more of the year, and incorporate observation of the trainer's practice. Instead of encountering many trainees all over the world, trainers would stay with one group of people for a longer period of time and go deeper with them. It might even be more economical.

For the jobless assistants, I would like to suggest: Senior assistant (i.e. prospective trainer), that have acquired the required experience and feels s/he is ready to teach independently will attract a small group of people who are interested to do the training. This prospective trainer will teach them for one year pre-training. Along this year, this assistant will receive supervision of a trainer who will be ready to be the Educational director while being the guest of the pre-training. The very fact that this prospective trainer would inspire people to commit themselves to learn the method and persevere in it will be the testimony of his/her capacity to be a trainer, more than personal opinion of colleagues that hardly saw his/her teaching in the context of leadership As we know, when the assistants do teach in a training they are subjected to a trainer. Besides, the training is designed to take care of trainees and time can not be devoted to the growth of assistants.

I suggest that at least the new trainings raised by the prospective trainers will be small (20 people maximum), will be local, will continue throughout the year and will provide the availability of viewing the practice of the teacher. After a successful internship-like first year they will be certified as a trainer and become the co-educational director for that training. This co-educational director will teach alternately with the Education director throughout the training while the guest trainers will come for short, intense periods of time. Towards the last years I believe this will be a pace that allows to absorb the learning and to give personal support.

Instead of starting teaching right from the beginning a big group, but needing to wait for it many years, why not start with a small group now? This structure might produce better skilled practitioners and the method will reach further.

For becoming a trainer, I would also like to suggest that all candidates will spend together a period of one or two weeks in which each one of them will teach the rest and share his or her inventions, talents and perceptions. Those peers will know who has reached the ability to take the challenge of independent leadership I believe that one learns to teach by teaching. The context determines the content. We need to create the context that gives the opportunity.

I realize my suggestions are breaking patterns into which a

lot of work has been invested. But aren't expanding patterns what we are trying to teach? How to awaken the resources striving for improvement and not letting them dry out in the stagnation that doesn't serve life. I have been talking for more than 4 years about the need to give an option to educational directors who are interested in assuming more responsibility and to allow them to change the proportion of teaching time between them and the visiting teachers, increasing it up till 70%. Our bureaucracy is fixed on 50% time and doesn't tolerate one day more or one day less. And even though I have been twice a member of the EuroTAB, I have not succeeded in modifying that.

So allow me to share my perceptions with the community. Maybe here it will awaken more effective resonance.

Thank you,
With Love and Care,
Ruthy Alon